

## 1 Samuel 12 - Passing the Baton

One of the unique things about Christianity is that we believe that time is linear - that all of history is moving in a particular direction. Time began at creation in Genesis 1 and all of history is headed toward final consummation when the Lord Jesus returns. History has a trajectory.

That's different than Buddhism that believes time is cyclical and people are reincarnated until they reach a perfect state called nirvana. It's different than secular atheism that believes time and matter are eternal and we are really just a blip on the eternal calendar and have no meaning.

As believers we see history heading toward an end. But at the same time we recognize that there are rhythms and patterns of life. Ecclesiastes touches on this:

A generation goes, and a generation comes,  
but the earth remains forever.  
The sun rises, and the sun goes down,  
and hastens to the place where it rises.  
The wind blows to the south  
and goes around to the north;  
around and around goes the wind,  
and on its circuits the wind returns.  
All streams run to the sea,  
but the sea is not full;  
to the place where the streams flow,  
there they flow again. (**Ecc. 1:4-7**)

There are rhythms and cycles in life until the return of Jesus. One of those cycles is the passing leadership. Older generations pass the mantle to leadership to younger generations. Some do it very well, others not so much.

And what I want to focus on this morning is not necessarily the need to pass the baton and plan for that, although we do. But more, when it's our time to pass the baton, as it were, what is it that we want to remind people of? How do we want to have lived our lives and what truths do we want to pass along?

1) If you are going to have any weight in other peoples' lives - any credibility - you must walk before them blamelessly. Read 1-3

Samuel is about to come down with some hard truths for the people of Israel. And this is a difficult time for him. Transitions are always tough.

I remember last spring I was at a men's retreat where professor McMath from Moody Bible Institute - now Great Northern University - was speaking. That Friday was the last day he would ever teach Christian history in an academic setting. MBI was closing, GNU was being established but he realized it was time to pass the reigns to a younger generation. And that's hard. I can't imagine the day I pass the pulpit over to some younger guy

For Samuel, not only was this a passing of the baton, this was really a rejection of his leadership, and his family, as well as a rejection of the Lord. This was personal, and difficult. And he knew nothing would change just because the people had a king. He knew that was just external. What really mattered was their heart.

And so before he gives this last hurrah speech, what he does is cash in all the credibility he has. He wants the people to understand that to the best of his ability he has served them faithfully. And he does so almost like something we would see in a courtroom. He calls people to testify against his character.

Has ever stolen anything? No.

Has ever taken a bribe as a politician? No.

Has he ever used his power to oppress people? No.

Political figures get accused of this all the time don't they? It's easy to be corrupted by power and use power for evil. And I think everyone rolls their eyes when some former politician who was weighed by scandal after scandal wants to lecture people on how moral and upright they should be. Their words are a joke. And just to be clear: this happens on both sides of the political spectrum all the time.

It's like our uncle drinking a beer shaking his finger at us saying: If I ever catch you with one of these... Sure uncle. Hypocrite.

But no one testifies against Samuel. No accuses him of any wrongdoing. It's not that he never sinned - every person sins. But it's that the course of his entire life has been blameless. And because the course of his entire life has been blameless, at the end of his life his words have true authority. His words have true weight.

**Heb 13:7:** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

True leaders are those who not only speak the Word of God, but how their life ends is important. Why? Because we should live like them. And how they live out their faith is to be imitated. And while that is clearly talking about leaders in the church, isn't that really true of every believer? Shouldn't we all strive to live in an exemplary manner?

Listen, if you want people to believe the gospel that you claim to believe, you have to live a life that is blameless. If your words about Jesus, and your warnings against sin are to have any affect, your life has to be transformed by that message. We have to look like the Jesus we claim to worship.

There was a time I was framer for a little while and when I first started my boss asked if I had a hammer. And I said I did - I had this small thing that the average American has to hang a picture with. And he chuckled and told me to go buy a framing hammer - something substantial. If not I'd spend all day hammering on 5 nails getting nowhere because the hammer just didn't have any weight. If you're going to drive nails all day you need a real hammer.

In the same way, if you want to drive the gospel home into peoples' life, you need a life that has some weight behind it. A life that is submitted to the Spirit and has the weight of blamelessness.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians:

For our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God and supremely so toward you. (**2 Cor. 1:12**)

His conscience was clear and so his message had weight. Samuel knew like Paul knew that his conscience was clear and so he could deliver a tough message that Israel needed to hear.

2) If your life is going to have any credibility you have to walk before the Lord blamelessly. **Read 4-6**

I mentioned that Samuel is essentially painting a courtroom picture here. He's called for Israel to testify against him. That's one witness. Now, he's calling on the Lord to testify against him. That's two witnesses. And he's also calling on the Lord's anointed to testify against him. The anointed one here is Saul, the new king. That's three witness.

Remember in the Bible how many witnesses do we need to convict someone? We need 2 or 3. So here, Samuel has provided - in a sense - 3 witnesses to testify to his character. Israel, Saul and the Lord. Israel has nothing against him. Saul his replacement as king has nothing against him.

But what I want to focus on here is that as far as he knows, the Lord has nothing against him. That's a bold statement isn't it? Can you imagine standing before people and saying "The Lord has nothing against me?"

Here's the reality: we can become very accustomed to living in such a way that other people **view** us as blameless. We can run a personal ad campaign where our lives look blameless to everyone on the outside. Where everyone else views us as holy and upright and yet our hearts are far from God. We can easily be functional Pharisees where we have near perfect obedience to the Law, but are far from God.

How could someone ever actually say that the Lord has nothing against them? Don't we sin all the time? Wasn't Paul the chief of sinners? How are we going to be any better? I think most of us probably feel as though God is constantly walking right behind us with a clipboard jotting down notes every time we sin.

Let me give you 4 thoughts on what it means to be blameless. First, blameless does not mean perfect. How do we know that? Because no one will ever be perfect. We will sin until we see Jesus. I know most of you don't have this impression, but you need to understand I am not sinless. I'm a filthy sinner. Ask my wife and kids! Some of you guys have seen me blow it in some pretty awesome ways. Samuel was no different. Blameless does not mean sinless.

Second, blameless does mean a commitment to repentance. Repentance is acknowledging our sin, feeling sorrow over our sin that it displeased God and harmed someone else, asking for forgiveness, and doing everything we can to make the situation right, and taking steps to guard against that sin in the future. That's repentance. Here's the problem with repentance. A lot of times we think the sign of maturity is that we don't sin as much so we don't have to repent as often. Less, therefore less repenting. Can I tell you a more accurate sign of maturity? It's not that we repent less in life, it's actually that we repent more and faster.

By more, I mean that as we mature in Christ what we might call "small sins" in our own life should bother us more and we should evidence repentance more often for them. Yea, maybe we don't swear as much, or watch movies we shouldn't, gossip, or whatever. But we become more sensitive to when we're coveting or greedy or materialistic lusting. So we end up repenting more.

We also repent faster. I know someone is maturing in Jesus because when they offend me or sin publicly it's not days and weeks before they apologize, it's minutes or hours. The time between the sin and the repentance shrinks. It's one of those almost-ironies of Scripture that those who are the most blameless are usually those who know they are not blameless. And so they are quick to apologize and ask forgiveness.

On the flip side of the same coin - so, third - blamelessness is a commitment to righteous living.

**1 Pet. 1:16:** It's commitment to being holy because the Lord is holy.

**Col 3:5:** It's a commitment to putting to death the deeds of the flesh: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, slander...as well as putting on compassionate hearts, meekness, humility, kindness, patience, forgiveness.

**Rom. 6:11:** It's considering ourselves dead to our sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus where active, conscious, obedience is the goal of our lives.

Fourth, being blameless is remembering that our standing before God is all about the sacrifice of Jesus. You realize God does proverbially walk around with a clipboard? We will give an account for every idle word we say. So God jots these things down but there's this little asterisk next to each one of those. You know what the little asterisk says? "Counted righteous in Christ."

Yes there will be an accounting of all that we do. But our true blamelessness is that through Jesus we are counted as righteous in the eyes of God.

No one thought that Samuel was standing up telling them that he was perfect. He certainly didn't have the discernment to identify that his kids were wicked. Just as we look to the sacrifice of Jesus over and over, he had actually sacrificed for his own sins many times. But he was committed to repentance, committed to righteousness and committed to following God by faith as **Heb. 11** tells us.

Our lives can't just be externally blameless, they have to be truly blameless before God.

3) We want to remind people of when it's our time to pass the torch: We need to remind people where they are weak. **Read 6-15**

So here Samuel flips the script on them. In the first section, he basically made the case that he was blameless before them. No one could charge him with anything.

Now, he turns the tables and goes on to show that they have been perpetually guilty before the Lord. And not just this generation, but every generation back to the time of Moses when Israel was brought out of Egypt. Where the Lord has been righteous and merciful and faithful, Israel has been continually disobedient.

**Vs. 10:** they had forsaken the Lord.

**Vs. 12:** they had rejected the Lord.

**Vs. 14:** they were disobedient to the Lord;

**Vs. 15:** rebelled against the Lord.

From Moses to Barak to Jephthah to Samuel - somewhere in the neighborhood of 1200 years - Israel fell back into the same rejection of God over and over again. This was the history of Israel. Ironically, Israel was God's chosen people in the OT. Do you remember what the name Israel means? "Strives against God" or "wrestles against God." And that's exactly what they did. God chose Israel, but they fought against him. They fell back into the same sin over and over again.

And listen: that's what we do as well. Most of us are prone to particular sins and we have to be on guard for those sins over the course of our entire life.

So if you struggled with greed as a kid, chances are you probably still struggle with greed. If you struggled with lust when you were in high school, chances are you still struggle with lust. If you struggled with depression or anger or alcohol or swearing or gossip then, unless the Spirit has done a radical work in you to purge you of sin and you never feel tempted by it, you probably still have to actively guard yourself from these sins day in and day out.

By the way, younger folks, this is something you need to really understand about the nature of sin in your own life. The sins that you struggle against now are likely the ones you will have to be on guard against all your life. You might gain absolute victory over some in your life - and I truly hope that you do - but for the most part you need to gear up for a life-long battle against the sins that you struggle against now.

And don't be discouraged when the same sins you battle now still rise up years and decades from now. It's not a reason to throw your hands in the air and say the battle doesn't matter. It's a reason to fall back to the grace of God that we have through Jesus.

But what we need in the midst of that is someone who will be faithful to call us on the carpet when we do sin. Who will solemnly warn us and rebuke us in the areas where we are prone to wander.

One of the things that happens when we continually battle the same sin over and over is that we get apathetic. We just don't care anymore. We give in to our sin or worse, we don't even see our sin. We need someone who will be faithful to remind us of our being prone to waywardness.

Jonathan Edwards: Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be. (Resolution 56)

Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.

And so not only do we need that person in our life, we need to be that person. That person who is willing to remind those dear to us of the dangers of their waywardness.

And we don't point this out in self-righteousness as though we could never, ever be tempted in such a way. We don't point this out in arrogant condemnation as though this person is a fool for struggling with sin. We don't point this out to belittle someone or to throw their sin back in their face. Our goal is not to grudge up past sins that should be long forgotten.

Our goal is to gently point out where our brother or sister is weak. "Hey, can I mention something to you? In the past when you've gone to hang out with those people you end up compromising yourself and your testimony. And we both know it's been bad. Do you really think doing this again is the best idea?"

"Hey, can I admonish you - warn you - for a minute? When you go into a situation like this you are often tempted to have an outburst of anger. Do you have a plan for when you're tempted to do that?"

We're not bringing up specific issues in the past. We're not guessing at their motives - as though we could ever know someone's heart. We're not even saying that they will sin. What we are saying is that there's a history, and here's a possible temptation, do they have a plan?

This is not nagging over and over about something, but it is just being frank with someone about weakness.

That's what Samuel did. This whole king thing wasn't going to solve the real issue which was their rejection of God despite his faithfulness to Israel. God would only deliver Israel as long as the people and the king were faithful. Maybe it was a shiny new governmental system, but the terms were still the same. And the issue was still the same. We're they going to be faithful to God?

So Samuel reminds them where they are weak.

#### 4) Remind people of the fear of the Lord. **Read 16-18**

This is really a classic thing God does throughout the OT where to confirm the gravity of the situation, he reveals himself in fearful way to his people. In **Ezra 10:9** the rain was so great the people feared the Lord. Right after Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal at Mt Carmel - after 3.5 years of drought - Elijah warned Ahab that a rain was coming so great it would overtake him (**1 Kings 18:41-46**).

And this isn't just a late summer rainstorm like what we have. This is in harvest time - late spring - when there is almost never any rain or lightning or thunder. And it is of such a magnitude the people are in stark fear of the Lord.

Now of course God doesn't necessarily send massive lightning storms out of season to remind us that we need to fear him. Sometimes he does. It seems that God sent a lightning storm to Martin Luther as an important part of his conversion. But most of us don't experience that. But here's the thing: because we don't experience those kinds of things, what we often need to remind people of is the fear of the Lord.

It is very easy for us to become complacent with God. It's very easy for us to think of God as our BFF, our good buddy, who loves us a lot. Maybe we view God as our life coach who kind encourages us to be the best we can be and maybe he gets in our business once in a while. But for the most part he's a good friend.

No. What we need to be continually reminded of in our casual, laid-back, life-is-all about-us culture is that God is to be feared. Not just respected like how we might treat a police officer or judge or boss. No, like his holiness is so overwhelming and

I was on a ladder changing a 300 watt light bulb this week and I changed it out and had someone flip the switch on and it was really, really bright and instantly I could feel this radiant warmth from the light. I think our conception of God's holiness is that he's about as holy as a 300-watt light bulb. He's bright and pure and hot, but we can deal with it. When in reality God's holiness is more light the light and heat from a nuclear explosion: so pure, so bright, so awesome, so righteous we would be vaporized in a millisecond if we were exposed to God in all of his glory.

That's the God we often call our buddy. Our pal. Is Jesus our friend? Yes he is. He is a friend to sinners. But get this: He is only a friend to sinners who are covered in his own righteousness. It is the glorious righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith that is the proverbial blast shield we have against the awesome glory of the holy God.

Once we understand those realities then we understand what it is to fear God and love God all at the same time. God's power and glory is amazing and fearful. And yet his love in saving us from that wrath is equally amazing.

We often emphasize the love. We also need to remind people of the fear.

5) Finally, when we are passing the baton we need to pray and reassure the people of God of the grace of God.

### **Read 19-25**

Can I just let the cat out of the bag here? Whether we're passing the baton, delegating something or entrusting someone with some sort of spiritual responsibility - they are going to mess it up! They're sinners just like we're sinners. Think back to some point in your life at all the mistakes and sin you've done when someone gave you a responsibility. It's bound to happen. Just know that. And just know that the Kingdom of God isn't going to collapse when they blow it.

Just like the Israelites crying out to Samuel: "Be sure to pray for us!" we need to be sure to pray for them. That God would give them wisdom and keep them from temptation and give them humility and grace.

And we need to remind them of God's grace. People don't usually grow by legalism. They don't grow when we pound on them for messing up and demand perfection of them. That's what legalism is.

Legalism says you have to perform perfectly to be accepted by God. And you have to perform perfectly to be accepted by me.

You know what the gospel of grace says? All these things I've warned you about and charged you to do? You can't possibly do them in your own strength. You're going to fail one way or another. But remember that when you do fail, Christ never fails. You still have a high priest, you are still covered by the grace of God in Jesus.

### **Read 22**

Isn't that what we need to hear? The Lord will never leave us or what? Forsake us. **Heb 13:5.**

We all need to be reminded of that, don't we? On the one hand we all need to be told these things. On the other, God is telling us go be that man. Go be that lady who encourages the next generation to serve the Lord faithfully.

### **Pray**